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How to Meet Temptation

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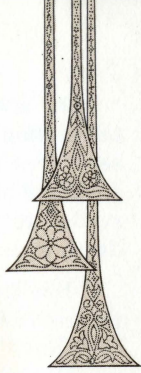
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HOW TO MEET TEMPTATION



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How To Meet Temptation

Man has struggled with temptation since the beginning of time. Satan's power to deceive and persuade to evil is well attested by the actual experience of all of us. To think of temptation as an age-old problem, however, must not prevent us from realizing, (and how can we ignore this,) that it is also today's spiritual battle for every man.

Peter, in his First General Epistle, shows that the Evil One deliberately seeks our spiritual overthrow. Peter counsels, "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand stedfast in your faith, . . ." (I Peter 5:8, 9a.).

The actual development of temptation and the sad consequences of our spiritual defeat through it are described by James in his New Testament Epistle. Notice carefully the results of one's surrender to temptation as I read verses thirteen through fifteen of James, chapter 1: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death."¹ (James 1:13-15).

To attempt to escape or deny the daily reality of temptation is to misunderstand life. The passage just read does not say we can completely remove ourselves from temptation but James does warn us of what surrender to temptation will cause — sin and spiritual death or separation from God.

But this is to get theory before practice. If James theoretically describes a disastrous process, the early chapters of Genesis chronicle this terrible sequence practically — in the lives of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Most of us are familiar with the Biblical facts involved. Man and woman are placed in the garden paradise with two responsibilities: to dress and keep the garden and to refrain from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17).

Here man knew complete harmony with God and eternity of life, for, as you will remember, God had not forbidden eating from the tree of life at this point. But a conversation developed between Satan and the woman. Eve was tempted to arrogate herself to God's nature and power. In fact the serpent, representative of the personal evil power, suggested of the forbidden fruit, ". . . for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

The appeals or temptations that now confronted Eve, even as we face similar appeals every day in modern life, were "to the physical and material," "to vanity," and to "a promise of greater knowledge and power" (p. 48, Ralph H. Elliott, **The Message of Genesis**: Nashville, Broadman Press, 1961).

Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise." In the words of the Apostle John in the New Testament, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life" so overwhelmed her that "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6; I John 2:15-17).

Sin resulted from this disobedience, transgression, rebellion and willful refusal to respect God's command. So sin has come in the same manner to grip and damn us ever since. Paul states, "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned . . ." (Romans 5:12). As a result of this conscious disregard

¹ All Biblical quotations are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

of God's will, Adam and Eve are cast from the Edenic paradise, barred from the tree of life, cursed with a rebellious soil in which they must toil for their bread, separated from further communion with God, and sentenced to physical suffering and death (Genesis 3:14-24).

It is at this point that we see "the disastrous living reality" of sin. Martin Luther once commented on this event, "Oh, how great was their fall! From their greatest trust in and their most perfect love toward God they had come to so great fear that they fled from the face of God" (p. 74, Martin Luther, **Commentary on Genesis**, 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958. Trs. J. Theodore Mueller).

Today men and women face the same appeals to the flesh, to material possession, to vain pride, to selfish glory, and to arrogant power. You doubt the same power of temptation today? When was the last time you cast lustful looks at your neighbor's wife or possession?

What blasphemy has come from your mouth or corrupted your heart today? You may know the craze of alcoholism or the living death of drug addiction. Are you a loyal and pure husband or wife? Corrupt business practices, personal disloyalties, religious hypocrisy, deliberate crime, sexual sin — how much more need I say about the power of temptation and the crushing consequences of our surrender to it in the modern world. No! Adam and Eve are not alone. We identify in point of reality and contemporary problems more closely with this first family and their unsuccessful struggle with temptation than almost any other event or message of God's word.

But our lesson today concerns, "How to meet temptation." This is our real hope — there is a way to overcome temptation, to successfully meet it! If Adam and Eve present the discouraging picture of surrender to temptation, then another Old Testament character offers us courage and inspiration in overcoming or meeting temptation without sin. I refer to that noble character of Genesis named Joseph.

We pick up the Biblical narrative of Joseph's life at the time of his first entrance into Egypt by way of an Ishmaelite caravan to whom his brothers — Jacob's sons — had sold him as a slave. Upon bringing their captive to Egypt the Ismaelites promptly sold him to an Egyptian captain of the guard named Potiphar (Genesis 39:1).

In verses one through six of Genesis, chapter thirty-nine, we learn of Joseph's rise to power and position within Potiphar's home in Egypt. His success, the Bible reveals, came by God's design and because of God's blessing (Genesis 39:2, 3). The wisdom and maturity Joseph displayed caused Potiphar to promote him to head of his house, or, in the words of the Bible, "overseer" of his house (Genesis 39:4). The Bible tells us that "Joseph was comely, and well-favored" and that he was given total control over Potiphar's house (Genesis 39:5, 6). Everything looked good for this handsome, wise, and winsome young man just fresh out of slavery and newly arrived in Egypt!

But temptation came, as it always does. It came at the time of Joseph's first real success in life. When everything seemed assured for many years of prosperity and responsibility, temptation came. "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, Lie with me" (Genesis 39:7). She "spoke to Joseph day by day," requesting his attention and illicit involvement with her (Genesis 39:10).

His temptation came not only at a time of success but it also arose from sources of powerful influence. Satan does not play with toy weapons when bringing men into sin. Joseph was a young man with great physical vigor and the normal passions of the flesh. His position also provided many opportunities for sin. He could possibly advance himself even further by his involvement with his master's wife. And there were her repeated advances. Rather than rationalize himself into sin Joseph handled his temptation positively and creatively like the New Testament teaches us to do today: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

Joseph's story is not that of Adam and Eve; rather we begin to see at the very moment of the lascivious offer from Potiphar's wife, the young man's successful reaction to temptation. First, he offers the woman three reasons why he will not participate in such impurity. His master—her husband—has placed unlimited confidence in him. Joseph is too much a man of honor to betray a friend and confidant (Genesis 39:8, 9).

Joseph then reminds his temptress that Potiphar had neither "kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife: . . ." (Genesis 39:9).

Joseph's second reason for repudiating temptation arose out of his respect for conjugal fidelity. Marriage, to Joseph, was an honorable institution. Joseph lived by the New Testament exhortation, "Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

As a third reason for his course of conduct Joseph reminds this woman of God and His will in matters of this nature. The young man's question places such moral impurity as fornication and adultery where God's Word places it when he says, ". . . how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Yes, Joseph respected his master, his master's wife, and himself; but all this resulted from his surrender and continual obedience to God.

Someone has written, ". . . the whole secret of Joseph's triumph was that he had principles and that he was faithful to them. Joseph had a sure grasp on two principles: that he was accountable to God for his actions, and that certain actions were wicked; and in the most tremendous hour of moral crisis which he knew he was saved by these principles" (p. 142, 143. "The Power of Principle," **The Speaker's Bible**, Edward Hastings, Ed.).

We further understand Joseph's victory over temptation when we notice that "he harkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her" in the face of her repeated advances (Genesis 39:9). Paul, in the New Testament, reminds us of the results of continued association and fellowship with evil. "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals. Awake to soberness righteously, and sin not; for some have no knowledge of God: I speak this to move you to shame" (I Corinthians 15:33, 34).

When reason and avoidance of social association failed, and when Potiphar's wife went to the extreme length of catching his "garment, saying, Lie with me: . . ." Joseph saw no alternative but to flee from her (Genesis 39:12). In fact the Bible tells us that "he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out" (Genesis 39:12). Today's overly tolerant man could never conceive of such hasty conduct. Yet, modern man can not explain why temptation so often overwhelms him. If we are to ever learn how to handle temptation, we must recognize that some situations demand such conduct.

Paul says to another young man like Joseph, "Flee

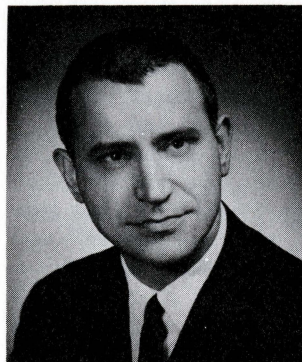
youthful lusts," and when talking of what the greed for money can do to one, the same writer urges young Timothy, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things;..." (II Timothy 2:22; I Timothy 6:11). Christians are urged to "flee fornication" in I Corinthians 6:18; and James instructs us, "Be subject therefore unto God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). With reason, with wise refusal of the encouragement of social association, and finally with deliberate bodily removal from the scene and act of temptation, Joseph triumphed!

In what appears to be very light punishment, Potiphar "put him (Joseph) into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison" (Genesis 39:19). Only the uninformed and prejudiced would remark, "See what such conduct accomplished for Joseph." In fact the very next verse of Genesis thirty-nine reads, "But Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21).

We then learn that Joseph was given charge of the prison by his jailor because "that which he (Joseph) did, Jehovah made it to prosper" (Genesis 39:23). For two years Joseph enjoyed this position of responsibility, at the end of which time came the greatest opportunity of his life—to become the executive assistant of the Pharaoh of Egypt (Genesis 41:1, 39, 40). Pharaoh remarked of this courageous young man, "there is none so discreet and wise as thou" (Genesis 41:39).

Stephen, in the sermon that caused his death in the New Testament, explains Joseph's rise to such a great position as the deliverance of God (Acts 7:9, 10). God promises you and me that same power of deliverance from sin. Listen carefully! "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (I Corinthians 10:13).

God is revealed today in Christ Jesus. Our Lord Jesus remarked while on the earth, "no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus promises each of us full knowledge and personal relationship with God through our acceptance of His teaching, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Power to overcome temptation like Joseph did belongs to all who know and obey God.



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He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.